

Hammerstrom's

for the people
in the 17th Senate District

Hotline



State Senator

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COMMITTEES TO EXAMINE MENTAL HEALTH SYSTEM. As chair of the Senate Health Policy Committee, it was my privilege to organize a series of joint committee meetings that began last week with the members of the Department of Community Health Appropriations Subcommittee. At this time, we have held the first of several hearings intended to examine the status of Michigan's mental health delivery system. The committees are meeting in response to a charge from Senate Majority Leader Ken Sikkema to suggest ways to improve both care and accountability in the mental health community. A press release was issued in early August detailing his concerns about growing accounts of shortcomings in services to the mentally ill. The hearing that was held the third week in September allowed for a number of presentations that provided committee members with background information.

SEPTEMBER IS NATIONAL FOOD SAFETY EDUCATION MONTH. September has been declared Food Safety Month in Michigan in accordance with the ninth annual National Food Safety Education Month (NFSEM). The Department of Agriculture has made food safety its primary goal and has dedicated numerous pages on its website to topics ranging from food safety in the home to sanitation training. That information can be found by

visiting www.michigan.gov/mda. Additionally, the NFSEM's 2003 theme *Store it. Don't Ignore It.* is educating the public on proper food storage procedures for both home-cooked and take-out meals. Interested persons can find this information at www.foodsafety.gov/~fsg/september.html.

OFIS WARNS CONSUMERS ABOUT A FRAUDULENT CREDIT UNION. The Office of Financial and Insurance Services (OFIS) is warning Michigan consumers about "First Rate Credit Union" and potential fraudulent activities. OFIS has learned that "First Rate Credit Union" is not chartered in any state or by the federal government and is not insuring the deposits of both state and federal credit unions. It appears the persons responsible for this activity are placing advertisements in local newspapers in an effort to lure consumers into financial transactions purporting to be loan and debt counseling services. These persons are attempting to obtain financial information from consumers. Consumers who have contacted "First Rate Credit Union" are encouraged to call the National Credit Union Association's Fraud Hotline at 1-800-827-9650.

SENATE TO SEEK SUBPOENA POWER. Leading Michigan Senators said this week they will seek subpoena power to help investigate the way in which student scores on the Michigan Educational Assessment Program (MEAP) were handled. The scores have been delayed because of numerous errors by companies hired to tabulate and report students' performance on the tests. The MEAP is used by the state to measure students' progress in math, English, science, and social studies. It has several other important functions as well, including assessing both a student's eligibility for the \$2,500 Merit Award Scholarship and each school's progress in educating its students. The state contracted with several vendors to provide the testing service, particularly the gathering and publishing of test data. Since then, though, vendors and administration officials have missed several deadlines, delaying or confusing the publishing of the test scores and, consequently, the eligibility of students for scholarships.

RECENT LAW LIFTS BAN ON CELL PHONE USE. Newly enacted legislation now allows individual school districts to either approve or prohibit the use of personal communication devices in the classroom. In 1988, Michigan passed a law that banned personal communication devices to deter illegal drug activity, as well as distractions during school. Recent legislation lifted that ban, allowing school officials to make the determination based on the needs and makeup of their individual districts. Parents should contact the schools their kids attend to obtain the newest guidelines for each of their students.

DID YOU KNOW? Bacteria grow most rapidly in the Danger Zone—the unsafe temperatures between 40° F and 140° F—so it's key to keep foods out of this temperature range. And, since cold temperatures keep most harmful bacteria from growing and multiplying, *be sure to refrigerate foods quickly!*